

On the Trail

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF EL DORADO NATURE CENTER FRIENDS & VOLUNTEERS

Behind the Scenery . . .

One of the things that make being a regular at the Nature Center so fun is taking note of the cycles that you see as time and seasons press onward. Watching a developing sycamore tree lose and regain its leaves or delighting in the appearance of baby birds as they peek out of the nest for the first time are some of the reasons why so many people feel connected to this place.

But as you know, behind this landscape of Mother Nature's design, there is a core of dedicated people working to make available to the whole community a myriad of education programs—all highlighting the wonder of nature and teaching about its discovery and stewardship. And, along with the cycles of nature itself, this organization has recently seen a change. El Dorado Nature Center is now under the new leadership of Supervising Park Naturalists Meaghan O'Neill and Donnie Haigh. They replaced Mary Blackburn, who retired in April.

Both Donnie and Meaghan come to their new positions with a wealth of experience. Donnie has been a naturalist with the Nature Center for more than 16 years and has a bachelor's degree in Community Health Education.

Meaghan has been with the Center since December 2003 and has background and education in animal science and husbandry. She began her career in environmental education at the Los Angeles Zoo and Botanical Gardens where she was also



Donnie Haigh and Meaghan O'Neill (seated)

trained as a zoo keeper. In addition, she began the education and volunteer programs at the Puente Hills Landfill Native Habitat Authority.

Both Meaghan and Donnie say that taking over after Mary's 22 years of service has been a challenging and rewarding task, one that is bringing new adventures all the time. "Over the years, while we were focused on delivering quality education programs to our community, we weren't fully aware of the behind the scenes intricacies of running an urban nature center," said Donnie.

Meaghan agrees and adds, "It's exciting

to see what we'll be able to accomplish."

The Nature Center has a rich history of educating the community about the land and teaching individuals how they can become engaged in discovering and preserving it. Both Donnie and Meaghan feel that this focus on ecological education is a guiding principle going forward. In addition, top priorities include implementing the Master Plan, which was designed as a roadmap to guide the Nature Center into the 21st Century, working to fulfill the Nature Center's mission to enhance wildlife habitat and the human spirit through education and citizen involvement opportunities while embracing the city's edict to create a sustainable Long Beach.

Yes, the look of the landscape may have changed a bit, but just like in nature's scenery it's poised for growth.

On the Trail Treeless Edition

If you would like to receive your El Dorado Nature Center *On the Trail* newsletter electronically, please send an email to Susan_Etinger@longbeach.gov. We'll be happy to add you to the list. And, it's in color!

VOLUNTEER NEWS

Trail Stewards

It is with pleasure that we welcome 12 new trail steward volunteers who joined the Nature Center family in June (see photo). During the summer they've been active, along with our seasoned volunteers, greeting visitors, helping report trail conditions and working to keep the trails clean and safe.

Their training in June included an introduction to the Nature Center's educational philosophy as well as a meeting with Ranger Bill Greco and Lieutenant Dan Pratt. Both Bill and Dan highlighted the policy of CPR: Courtesy, Politeness and Respect when interacting with people on the trail. Trainees learned that as an ambassador for the Nature Center, they also help people discover more of what they're seeing. They do this by using open-ended questions and pointing out sights as they go.

Many thanks to all our Trail Steward volunteers: **Lee Warren, Linda Diaz, Craig Matheny, Steve Witt, Al Kimura, Gloria Potocki, Dorothy Geisler, Dee Barnard, Jeremy Blatchford, Judith Blatchford, Diana Chiang, Paul Kiley, Steve Liivoja, Steve McCord, Mary Stebbins, Frances Tomich, Ed Brzezinski, Stephanie Rodriguez, and Ron Sievers.**

Habitat Stewards

Our dedicated Habitat Stewards have been busy at work in recent months helping with trail maintenance around the Center. But, the exciting project that everyone has been waiting for has finally arrived.

Habitat Steward volunteers have begun a propagation nursery with the intention of supplying native plants that can be used in the Nature Center as we continue restoration. The first wave of seedlings will emphasize native grasses. The seeds will come from various resources including local restored natural areas and plant experts. The grasses should be ready to put in the ground by early winter. The first location to receive the freshly home-propagated grasses will be the meadow area just past the bridge on the south side of the North Pond.

"Now that we can propagate some of our own plants, we'll be able to have greater variety," says naturalist Richard James. "We'll also save time and money. Plus, it's



New Trail Stewards:

L to R, Front: Craig Smith, Melanie Smith, Linda Christensen, Nancy Kimes, Jennifer Cozen. Back: Ben Celis, Marie Kiss, Sharon Hess, Damon Nixon, Theresa Alletto, Roger Boswell, and Leticia Hernandez.

lots of fun."

Thank you to the many dedicated, passionate and enthusiastic volunteers who help keep the Nature Center planting areas vibrant and healthy. They are: **Pamela Angeles, Margaret Brandt, Tom Fowler, Nancy Hagthorp, Harry Hatanaka, Lynne Horn, Caroline Klund, Kerry Martin, Suzanne McMichael, Dee Reynolds, Diedra Sanard, Don Scales, Jo Ann Smith, Neil Uelman, Maria Zawacki, and Linda Bryan-Thompson.**

If you want to dig into native plants and work in the soil to help beautify and restore habitat at the Nature Center, now is the time to sign up for Habitat Stewards training. Three days of training are required: **September 26, Oct. 3 and November 7, 9 am to noon.** Call 570-1750 for additional information and an application.



Our regular Thursday group of Habitat Stewards are ready to get started working in the new propagation nursery utilizing our recently constructed planting tables. L to R: Margaret Brandt, Caroline Klund, Tom Fowler, Joanne Smith and Kerry Martin

Sharing Nature in the City

Sharing Nature Volunteers have been very active out in the community in recent months. The Nature Center is often asked to send representatives to interact with the public at community based ecological fairs and events. Volunteers take information about Nature Center programs and educate the visitors about what steps can be taken for a greener community. Thank you to **Lu and John Bowden, Lou Schumow, Thais Edmonds, Hank Warzybok and Maria Zawacki** for their good work and enthusiasm.

Moveable Museum

Both *Protect Our Watery World* and *Acorn Sea and Sage* were busy visiting schools in the springtime, meeting enthusiastic teachers and students. Our talented volunteers presented informative programs to hundreds of students about saving marine life and the history of native Tongva people. Thank you to **Ray Ramos, Lou Schumow, Ann Cantrell, Dorothy Geisler and Mary Stebbins** for their commitment to this special program.

Volunteer Enrichment —

How Life Works Together

Don't miss the next installment of our enrichment series as we take a look at the symbiotic relationship between plants and animals at the Nature Center. Join naturalist Richard James on a special walk that will highlight native plants and how animals are dependent on them for survival. This will be a great way to prepare for the Plant Sale, planting your own native garden or to just learn more about what's happening on the trail.

Sunday, October 5, 9:30 to 11:30 am. Space is limited, so call ahead to reserve your spot, 570-1745. See you there!

Native Plant Sale Coming in October

Why native plants? Once they're in your garden you'll discover the birds, butterflies and other pollinators they attract. Whether you choose plants, shrubs or trees, you'll create habitat. Don't be shy...there are natives that thrive in sun or shade or both... something for everyone. Sow annual wildflower seeds in fall amongst your perennials for a splash of extra color in spring and early summer. Natives can be planted in containers as well as in the ground. You'll delight in the fragrances and beauty they share.

If this sounds interesting, come to the *Friends of El Dorado Nature Center* annual **California Native Plant Sale** on **Saturday, October 25**. If you are new to owning native plants, there will be experts on-hand to answer questions and help you make selections.

Join or renew your membership in *Friends of El Dorado Nature Center* and you will be able to attend a preview sale at

9 am. The general public is invited at 9:30 am. The sale concludes at 2 pm.

Parking fee of \$7 will be waived with purchase of \$75 or more.



More than 50 varieties of plants will be available for purchase at this annual event.

IMPORTANT REMINDER

As the year approaches its end, please remember to renew your ***Friends of El Dorado Nature Center*** membership. Your renewal will enable us to continue to bring quality education programs to the community and provide wildlife habitat for the future. Plus, as an added bonus, you'll be able to enter the Plant Sale, on October 25, before the public start time.

Enclosed you'll find a *Friends* envelope so you can make your gift today. Thank you.

Which came first, the Oak or the Squirrel?

When you walk the Nature Center trails, pay particular attention to the squirrels under the Coast Live Oak trees. Squirrels are omnivores and can eat a wide variety of food including nuts, seeds, cones, fruits, fungi, vegetation and insects. The main part of their diet, especially during the fall and winter months, is the acorns they collect and store. At first glance, this might seem problematic for the oak trees. After all, each acorn is also a seed--a potential baby oak tree. It turns out that the relationship between oaks and squirrels is more of a win-win situation for them both.

Much like bees and flowers, where the bee benefits from the energy in the flower's nectar and the flower benefits from the bee dispersing its pollen, both the oak tree and the squirrel help each other. This type of relationship is called mutualism and like the word implies, is mutually advantageous. The squirrel gains the nutrient-rich packet of food that is an acorn. Easily eaten, and easily stored, acorns sustain squirrels throughout

the winter months when other food is more difficult to find.

But how does this relationship help the oak tree? It turns out that squirrels are



Eastern Golden Squirrels and California Ground Squirrels are among the types found at El Dorado Nature Center.

both busy and forgetful. Gray squirrels practice what is called scatter hoarding, where they dig multiple holes and bury individual nuts and acorns in numerous locations. They then use their keen sense of smell to locate the buried acorns later. But, squirrels don't dig up all of them. Birds, like crows and jays, often watch squirrels bury nuts and dig them up as soon as the squirrel leaves. Ultimately though, many of the acorns remain in the ground and germinate the following spring. Researchers have found that squirrels play an important role in maintaining and regenerating oak forests and may even have been responsible for spreading the vast oak forests in North America.

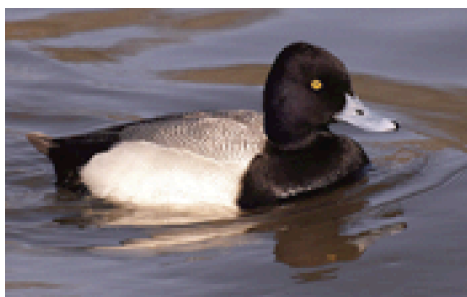
So, next time you admire the dappled sunlight filtering through the canopy of the oak tree overhead, you can thank a squirrel—primarily for working so hard during the fall months, but also for being just a teensy bit forgetful!

The Fall Forecast at Colorado Lagoon

The dog days of summer at Colorado Lagoon are winding down and the warm weather that once beckoned beachgoers is now mellowing to milder conditions. Days of seeing Forester's Terns display their aerial acrobatics before plunging into the water to catch smelt are numbered. Fall is on its way and it marks the end of crowds of people at the Lagoon and the beginning of masses of migrating birds.

In late fall and early winter, as the weather turns cold in Canada and Alaska, birds begin their southward journey in search of food. Forester's and Least Terns who have spent the summer breeding in our area, must now head south to winter in Central America and South America. For other birds, Colorado Lagoon may be as far as they travel southward for the winter. On a walk anytime from December through February you will likely encounter flocks of American Coots, American Wigeons, Ruddy Ducks, and Lesser Scaups. These birds may only stopover for a night or two to rest, or spend a few months at the Lagoon, depend-

ing on their final destination. Out on the floating platform it is a common sight on a crisp, sunny morning to see 10-15 Double-crested Cormorants drying their wings. Fall and winter may not be the ideal time to head down with your swimsuit and beach towel, but if you enjoy birdwatching, there are few better places to be than Colorado Lagoon.



A Lesser Scaup.

In November, naturalists from El Dorado Nature Center will begin to work again with Rogers Middle School and Long

Beach Poly High School for the third year in a row. Both schools have participated in year-long wetland education programs at the Lagoon, which has given them the unique, hands-on experience of watching the area change throughout the seasons.

In addition the anticipated two-phase wetland habitat restoration plan designed for the Lagoon will be up for city council approval soon. The ultimate goal of the proposed restoration is to improve the water quality of the Lagoon for both wildlife and the public. Some of the changes would include dredging and contouring the Lagoon bottom, cleaning and possibly widening the culvert leading to Marine Stadium, removing storm drains, and constructing mechanisms to eliminate runoff and debris entering the Lagoon. A series of walking trails and viewing areas also will be created as well as native plant zones. The plan aims to greatly improve the natural wetland habitat while still maintaining areas for public recreation and enjoyment.

Progress on the Stream Restoration

As many of you know, El Dorado Nature Center received a grant to restore the stream running between the North and South lakes. This restoration will speed up water flow and establish a more natural, vital environment for habitat. At this time, the project is awaiting contract bidding and then approval by the City council. Construction is estimated to start in early October and during that time, portions of the trails will be closed.

This is an exciting endeavor, as it will greatly improve stream conditions and habitat as well as visitor's ability to enjoy the stream. We will keep you informed as more information is available.



Eating Locally, Right In Your Own Backyard

Food trends are revelatory in American society. We often obsess over the quality, quantity and philosophy of our food. Among growing food shortages, pesticide concerns and salmonella outbreaks, more people want to know,

"Where does my food come from?" Many experts agree that the best way to reduce concerns, whether they are environmental, human rights based, or health related, is to eat locally grown food. And what could be more local than your own backyard or patio?

Instead of planting a row of pansies in your flowerbed, consider rows of sweet summer corn. The best way to squash anxiety about modern food selection is to grow your own squash. The backyard is a perfect setting for homegrown sustainability-- a pot with heirloom tomatoes, or a mixed bou-



quet of fresh herbs. Start simply and enjoy the everyday pleasure of working in the soil and getting your hands dirty. Consider your options: adorn your front yard with a vegetable patch and create neighborhood conversation or join a local community garden.

Another option for foodies-in-training is to attend El Dorado Nature Center's **Vegetarian Community Potlucks** the last Tuesday of the month from 6 to 9 pm. You'll enjoy conversation about food and hear local experts give advice and information on everything from food processing to selection and preparation.

Growing your own produce is the best way to connect with the food you are eating, philosophically and physically. And you'll never look at a vegetable the same way once you've tasted a delicious, under-the-Californian-sun homegrown carrot.



El Dorado Nature Center

*Thank you to all of our new Friends who have joined since February 2008.
Your generous contributions help make El Dorado Nature Center
a place for education and recreation like no other!*

SUN

Frances Tomich

LARGE DONATION

Anonymous Donations - \$1000

RED EARED SLIDERS

Marcia Goodman
Gary Howe

BUTTERFLY

Cindy Chhay
Desiree Daniels
Tyler French
Ashley Gunckel
Fergie Newbaker
Lochlann O'Neill
Tom O'Neill

ACORN

Jack Nygaard
Ingeborg Witthuhn

Help enhance the habitat and the excellent educational programs you love by renewing your membership in **Friends of El Dorado Nature Center** today. Your support is essential.
Make a difference in your community by joining today!
For more information (562) 570-4935



Super Science classes were held for ages 3 to 5 and 6 to 9 years old at the Nature Center and 6 to 9 year olds at Colorado Lagoon in June, July and August. Children learned about nature through creative hands-on activities.

The left photo shows Meaghan O'Neill and the Huffalump pa-

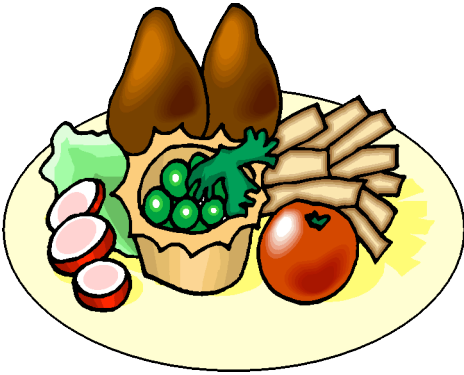


rade during her 100 acre wood class for preschoolers. The class focused on various animals that call the Nature Center home.

The right photo shows amateur pirates who searched for the treasures of Colorado Lagoon. The last day was partially spent building forts.

Quality Time

Everyone at El Dorado Nature Center appreciates the beauty of the earth and loves working for its preservation. But it's a special privilege to share the journey with those who have the same passion. Come share the warmth of friendships and let us say thank you for all you do for the Nature Center by attending our **Annual Holiday Potluck on Tuesday, December 2 at 6 pm**. Bring a dish for five, and plan to enjoy yourself. See you there!



Mark Your Calendar

International Coastal Cleanup

September 20, 9 am to noon

Habitat Stewards Training

September 26, October 3 & November, 9 am to noon

Bird Walks at Colorado Lagoon

October 4 & December 13, 9 to 10 am

Volunteer Enrichment

October 5, 9:30 to 11:30 am

Weaving Baskets, Weaving Stories

October 11, 10 am to 1 pm

Container Gardening with Native Plants

October 18, 10 am to noon

Plant Sale

October 25, 9 am to 2 pm

Native Plant Lecture

November 1 & December 6, 2 to 4 pm

Andy Goldsworthy Day

November 15, 12 to 3 pm

Tellebration

November 22, 7:30 to 9:30 pm

Origami Outdoors

November 22, 10 am to noon

Volunteer Potluck

December 2, 6 pm

Solstice Campfire

December 20, 7 to 9 pm

New Year's Campfire

December 31, 7 to 9 pm

Winter Break workshops

December 22 through January 2